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Report of the High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development on its sixth session

(New York, 4-6 September 1996)

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I. ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION

1. The sixth session of the High-Level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development was held at United Nations Headquarters from 4 to 6 September 1996. Twelve members of the Board attended: Maria Julia Alsogaray, Birgitta Dahl, Nikolai Drozdov, David Hamburg, Abid Hussein, Laura Novoa, David Pearce, Qu Geping, Maurice Strong, Suh Sang-Mok, Mostafa Tolba and Ernst-Ulrich von Weizsäcker. Six members were unable to attend: Christina Amoako-Nuama, Princess Basma Bint Talal, Jörg Imberger, Jacques Lesourne, Marcilio Marques Moreira and Emil Salim.

2. The officers elected at the fifth session for the 1996-1997 term (see E/CN.17/1996/31, para. 50) were Birgitta Dahl (Chairperson), Emil Salim (Vice-Chairperson) and Jörg Imberger (Rapporteur). In the absence of Jörg Imberger at the sixth session, the Board unanimously elected David Pearce as interim Rapporteur.

3. The session was opened by the Chairperson, who reviewed the programme of work for the session. At the opening meeting, the Director of the Division for Sustainable Development, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, reviewed the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the preparations for the 1997 review of progress achieved in the implementation of the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development noted that the Board could make a valuable contribution to the 1997 review by addressing issues that were being neglected by the existing intergovernmental process because of the political controversies that they generated. The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who had been invited as an observer, reviewed the emerging and continuing priorities of UNEP.

4. The Board met with the Secretary-General at a luncheon on 6 September and discussed with him the contribution of the Board to the 1997 review process.

5. The Board also had a dialogue with a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), who discussed the UNDP Initiative for Sustainable Energy.

6. Substantive services for the session were provided by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

7. Discussions at the sixth session focused on the organization and contents of the report to be prepared by the Board as a contribution to the 1997 review of the progress achieved in the implementation of the commitments made at UNCED, as agreed at the Board's fifth session. Because the Board considered the report as a work in progress, it did not adopt policy recommendations. Discussions were based on the outline agreed at the fifth session, a preliminary draft

report prepared by the United Nations Secretariat based on that outline, comments from Board members on the outline and the draft, and other documentation related to the 1997 review.

8. The Board agreed that its report for the 1997 review would focus on sustainable development in three critical sectors - energy, transport and water - for each of which the report would examine policy measures for ensuring sustainable development, impediments to the application of such measures and policy packages that might overcome them.

9. In considering policy measures, the report would consider measures to ensure that the prices of energy, transport and water reflect the full cost of using those resources, including their economic, environmental and social costs. Consideration would also be given to regulatory, institutional and political measures necessary for effectively promoting the efficient and sustainable use of resources at full-cost pricing.

10. The report could consider how to mobilize and combine political, economic and social forces and forge alliances between financial institutions, business circles and non-governmental organizations in order to achieve the desired goals. It was proposed that the report identify, in a number of carefully selected areas, the programmes and partnerships that would meet the needs of people, make use of available technology and contribute to the fulfilment of common goals for sustainable development.

11. It was agreed that the report would give particular consideration to the problems of sustainable development of large urban conglomerations and to the interdependence of energy, transport and water in such areas. Consideration would also be given to measures for providing electricity to the 2 billion people who currently do not have access to electricity, with particular attention to decentralized rural energy sources.

12. In addition to the analytical material and recommendations, the report would contain, in the form of boxes, information on market-based pricing of energy, transportation and water, as well as examples of successful sustainable energy, transport and water policies.

13. The Board noted that energy is essential for development but that its inefficient use causes pollution, with harmful effects on human health and economic activities, and results in wasteful expenditure that limits development. The Board considered that full-cost pricing is essential to meeting the energy needs of the existing global population, as well as of the expected increased population. Policies to be considered to increase energy efficiency, promote new technologies and encourage renewable and low-carbon energy sources included subsidy removal, energy taxes, pollution taxes and tradeable pollution permits. Consideration should also be given to policy packages that can overcome potential political impediments by recycling tax revenues back to affected industries, compensating low-income groups for any losses, and phasing in cost increases gradually to allow industries and households to adapt their energy consumption behaviour and planning.

14. The Board noted that the transportation sector has contributed to alarming and deteriorating environmental trends throughout the world, including chronic and acute respiratory illness, accidents, noise, global warming through carbon dioxide emissions, and congestion. The Board considered that no single policy measure is likely to succeed but that a combination of measures is required, including urban land use planning; proper pricing of transport fuels, vehicle use, roads and parking space; investment in mass-transit systems; road traffic management systems that give preference to high-occupancy vehicles; and the removal of the implicit subsidy for air traffic arising from the international agreement that precludes taxation of aviation kerosene. Mounting public concern with the harmful effects of current transportation systems should facilitate the formation of new strategic alliances to promote the necessary policy changes.

15. The Board noted that clean water is becoming a scarce commodity in many countries, with increasing competition among domestic, agricultural and industrial users and among users of bodies of water shared by different countries. At the same time, large-scale water projects have resulted in harmful effects, such as waterlogging and salination of soils, habitat alteration, and the spread of schistosomiasis. The Board considered that there is a potent risk of conflict where countries sharing river basins combine circumstances of limited water resources, rapidly growing populations, urbanization, industrialization and unregulated water use. Efficient use of water requires full-cost pricing as part of a complex set of policies addressing both quantity and quality of water under the heading of integrated watershed management by river basin authorities. Policy instruments to be considered include user charges reflecting social cost, cost recovery for infrastructure financing, cross-subsidization of household use, reallocation of taxes and transferable water rights, all of which might require the reform of legal systems based on traditional water rights.

III. ARRANGEMENTS FOR FUTURE WORK

16. The Board requested the Secretariat, in consultation with the interim Rapporteur, to prepare a draft of its report for the 1997 review for circulation to members as soon as possible. Comments on the draft submitted to the Secretariat by members would be circulated, allowing revisions of the text to be prepared and circulated in advance of the seventh session.

17. The Board agreed that at its seventh session, to be held in Monaco from 14 to 17 January 1997, it would complete work on its report for the 1997 review. Specialists from United Nations programmes or organizations, business circles and financial institutions could be invited to contribute to the Board's discussions on concrete implementation.

18. The Board agreed that when its final report for the 1997 review was available, members would disseminate it within their constituencies, including if possible through meetings organized to consider the issues discussed in the report.

19. The Board also agreed that it would consider its future work programme at its seventh session. Members were invited to submit proposals for topics for future study.

Annex I

AGENDA

1. Opening of the session: adoption of the agenda and schedule of work.

2. Review of preparations for the 1997 review:

   (a) Review of the fourth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development;

   (b) Review of Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and task managers' meetings;

   (c) Status of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; the Convention on Biological Diversity; and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa.

3. Organization of the Board's report for the 1997 review.

4. Introduction and general issues:

   (a) Achievements of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;

   (b) Impediments to sustainable development;

   (c) The way forward: general issues;

   (d) Regional approaches.

5. Sustainable energy.

6. Sustainable transportation.

7. Other issues.

8. Organization of work for the seventh session.

9. Report of the sixth session.

Annex II

CURRICULA VITAE OF BOARD MEMBERS

Chairperson

Birgitta DAHL (Sweden). Speaker, Parliament of Sweden. Member, Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party. Member, Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs. Former positions include Minister of Environment (1990-1991), Minister of Environment and Energy (1986-1990), Minister of Energy (1982-1986). Received professional education in Sweden (History and Political Science).

Vice-Chairperson

Emil SALIM (Indonesia). Member of the Economic Team of the President of Indonesia; member, People's Consultative Congress; member, Academy of Sciences, Indonesia. Former positions include Minister of State for Population and the Environment; President, Governing Council of UNEP; Professor in Economics, University of Indonesia. Received professional education in Indonesia and the United States of America (Economics). J. Paul Getty award (U.S. World Wild Life Fund). Author of Pemerataan Pendapatan and Perencanaan (1978); Pembangunan Berwawasan (1986).

Rapporteur

Jörg IMBERGER (Australia). Professor of Environmental Engineering, Director of the Centre for Environmental Fluid Dynamics and Chair of the Centre for Water Research, University of Western Australia. Currently Chair of the Western Australia Esturaine Research Foundation and Scientific Adviser to Earthwatch. Member, Australian Academy of Sciences. Past posts include various academic positions in Australia and abroad, and consultancies to many state and federal government bodies and private agencies. Recipient of various awards for contribution to environmental issues. Received professional education in Australia and the United States of America.

Members

Maria Julia ALSOGARAY (Argentina). Member of the National Cabinet; Secretary of the Secretariat for Natural Resources and Human Environment. Former positions include Vice-President, National Defense Commission of the National Chamber of Deputies; Member, Commission of Foreign Relations, National Defense, Science and Technology; National Congresswomen for the Unión del Centro Democrático, Buenos Aires; Delegate of Argentina to the Argentine-Uruguayan Economic Cooperation Agreement; Adviser in the delegation to the Latin American Free Trade Associations; and various positions in the private sector. Received professional education in Argentina.

Christina AMAOKO-NUAMA (Ghana). Minister for Environment, Science and Technology. Former positions include Minister for Environment; environmental consultant active in biodiversity conservation; member of Ghana National

Development Planning Commission. Held various academic positions. Received professional education in Ghana and Canada.

Her Highness Princess Basma BINT TALAL (Jordan). Founder of Queen Alia Fund for Social Development and Chairperson of its Board of Trustees; Chairperson of Arab Association of Women and Development; Chairperson, Jordanian National Committee for Women.

Nikolai DROZDOV (Russia). Environmental writer and Biologist. Associate Professor, Faculty of Geography, Moscow State University; presenter and producer of well-known Russian TV programme "In the world of animals" and other nature programmes. Took part in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere expedition to the Pacific islands of Tonga and Samoa. Author of 20 books and numerous research papers on biology, geography and nature conservation. Recipient of several international awards. Received professional education in the Russian Federation and Australia. Member of Explorers Club and New York Academy of Sciences.

David A. HAMBURG (United States of America). President, Carnegie Corporation of New York. Serves on the boards of the Rockefeller University, the Mount Sinai Medical Center, the American Museum of Natural History, the Johann Jacobs Foundation. Member, American Philosophical Society and American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Former positions include Professor and Chairman, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and Reed-Hodgson Professor of Human Biology, Stanford University; President of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences; Director, Division of Health Policy Research and Education, and John D. MacArthur Professor of Health Policy, Harvard University; Chairman of the Board, American Association for Advancement of Science. Served as Chairman and member of several national science policy groups, including the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology. Research interests and contributions include biological responses and adaptive behaviour, human aggression, biomedical and behavioural sciences, links between behaviour and health, and child and adolescent development. Received professional education in the United States. Author of Today's Children: Creating a Future for a Generation in Crisis.

Abid HUSSEIN (India). Formerly Ambassador to the United States. Currently Vice-Chairman, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation.

Jacques LESOURNE (France). Professor, Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers. Former positions include Director, Le Monde; Founder, Society for Economics and Applied Mathematics; Leader, OECD Interfutures Project.

Marcilio Marques MOREIRA (Brazil). Director, Programme of Advanced International Studies, State University, Rio de Janeiro; Special Adviser to the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro and Senior International Advisor to Merrill Lynch; Member of the Advisory Boards of General Electric, South America, Hoechst-Brazil and American Bank Note-Brasil. Previous positions include Minister of Economy, Finance and Planning; Ambassador to the United States; Alternate Director, International Monetary Fund and InterAmerican Development Bank; Adviser to the Minister of Finance and member of the Board of the National Development Bank; several other high-level positions in academia, administration and private

sector. Member of the boards of various other institutions and professional organizations. Author and co-author of several books. Received professional education in Brazil and the United States of America.

Laura NOVOA (Chile). President, PARTICIPA (a Chilean non-governmental organization on education and democracy); member of the Council, PAZ CIUDADANA; member of the law firm Philippi, Yrarrazaval, Pulido and Langlois (mining and corporate matters); formerly responsible for public services in State mining companies; collaborated in the drafting of various bills; member of Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. Recipient of Keogh Award from New York University for distinguished public services. Received professional education in Chile and the United States of America (Law).

David PEARCE (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Professor of Environmental Economics, University College, London, and Director, Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment; Chairman, ECE Economic Group on Acid Rain; member, Scientific Advisory Panel of the Global Environment Facility. Previous positions include Personal Adviser to the Secretary of State for Environment, United Kingdom. Author, co-author or editor of many books on economics, environment, sustainable development; extensive international consultative experience. Received professional education in the United Kingdom.

QU Geping (China). Chairman, Environmental and Resource Protection Committee, National Peoples' Congress. Former positions include Vice-Chairman, Environmental Protection Commission, State Council Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, China. Head of Mission of China to UNEP. Received professional education (Engineering) in China and the United Kingdom. Author of numerous publications on environmental issues, including China's Environment and Development (1993); Studies on Environmental Services in China.

Maurice STRONG (Canada). Chairman, Environmental Capital Corporation; Senior Adviser to the President of the World Bank. Former positions include Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Hydro; Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; Under-Secretary-General and Executive Coordinator, the United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa; Director, United Nations Environment Programme; President and Chief Executive Officer, Petro-Canada; Chairman, Board of Governors, International Development Research Centre, Canada. Received professional education in Canada (Business). Recipient of numerous awards and honorary doctorates.

SUH Sang-Mok (Republic of Korea). Member, National Assembly; Chairman, Kangnam-gu A District Chapter, Seoul; President, Institute for Public Policy Studies. Previous positions include Minister, Ministry of Health and Welfare; Director-General, Policy Coordination Office, the Democratic Liberal Party; member of several National Assembly committees; Vice-President, Korean Development Institute; member, Pacific Board of Economists, Time Magazine; Senior Counsellor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Economic Planning Board of the Republic of Korea. Author of several books and articles. Received professional education in the United States.

Mostafa TOLBA (Egypt). Professor, Faculty of Science, Cairo University. President, ECOPAST - Centre for Environment and Cultural Heritage,

Washington, D.C.; President, International Centre for Environment and Development. Former positions include Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UNEP; Head, Egyptian delegation to the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment (1972). Received professional education in Egypt and the United Kingdom (Botany). Author of numerous papers on plant diseases, anti-fungal substances and physiology of micro-organisms and on the environment, including Sustainable Development: Constraints and Opportunities (1987).

Ernst Ulrich von WEIZSÄCKER (Germany). President, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Science Centre, North-Rhine Westphalia. Member of the Club of Rome. Previous positions include Director, Institute for European Environment Policy; Director, United Nations Centre for Science and Technology for Development; President, University of Kassel, Germany; Chairman, Association of German scientists. Author of Ecological Tax Reform, Earth Policies; co-author of Factor Four: Doubling Wealth, Halving Resource Use (forthcoming).